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Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006)

Reporting period from 7 November 2017 to 28 February 2018

I. Introduction

1. The present report provides a comprehensive assessment of the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) since my report of 16 November 2017 (S/2017/964), including on specific provisions of Security Council resolution 2373 (2017). During the reporting period, there was no progress with regard to the outstanding obligations of the parties under resolution 1701 (2006) or towards a permanent ceasefire. The situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remained generally calm.

2. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 1757 (2007), I extended the mandate of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon from 1 March 2018 for a period of three years, or upon completion of the cases before the Special Tribunal if sooner.

II. Implementation of resolution 1701 (2006)

A. Situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

3. The Israeli and Lebanese authorities continued to reaffirm their commitment to resolution 1701 (2006) and to the cessation of hostilities. Despite the relative calm along the Blue Line and in the area of operations, certain developments during the reporting period, as elaborated upon in this report, led to heightened tensions. The United Nations continued to urge both parties to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric that could lead to incidents and threaten the cessation of hostilities, and to utilize established channels to address concerns. UNIFIL and my Acting Special Coordinator for Lebanon maintained permanent liaison with both parties to de-escalate tensions.

4. Following the announcement by the United States of America of 6 December on Jerusalem, some 24 demonstrations were held in the UNIFIL area of operations. On 17 December, approximately 35 individuals protested near Kafr Kila (Sector East), where they started a small fire in an area near the Israeli technical fence. Israeli soldiers extinguished the fire before releasing tear gas to disperse the crowd. On 21 December, over 300 students assembled peacefully outside the UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura (Sector West), and on 29 December, approximately 300

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individuals protested in Kafr Kila. UNIFIL worked closely with the Lebanese Armed Forces, present during the gatherings, and the Israel Defense Forces, to prevent any escalation.

5. In early December, video footage emerged of Qais al-Khazali, of the Iraqi Shi'te militia Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, visiting South Lebanon in military uniform in the company of Hizbullah representatives. On 9 December, the Prime Minister of Lebanon, Saad Hariri issued a statement asserting that he had contacted military and security officials to investigate and to take measures to prevent any person from carrying out military activities and prevent Qais al-Khazali's re-entry into Lebanon. UNIFIL formally conveyed its concern to the Lebanese Armed Forces about the reported visit and requested an update on the outcome of the investigation. In his letter addressed to me dated 12 December (S/2017/1043), the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations stated that that visit constituted a violation of resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1559 (2004). On 15 January, an arrest warrant was issued in Lebanon for Qais al-Khazali, after the investigation found that he had illegally entered Lebanon.

6. On 26 December, a photograph appeared on social media in which Haj Hamza (Abu al-Abbas), the commander of an Aleppo-based pro-Syrian government militia, Imam al-Baqir Brigade, appears to be standing near the Blue Line. In a letter addressed to me dated 5 February (S/2018/91), the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations stated that a senior Iranian official, Ebrahim Raisi, visited the UNIFIL area of operations close to the Blue Line on 28 January and was accompanied by "uniformed and armed members of Hizbullah". UNIFIL cannot confirm this information. On both occasions, UNIFIL formally sought clarification from the Lebanese Armed Forces. Responses from the Lebanese Armed Forces are pending.

7. UNIFIL observed an increase in construction activities, including vegetation clearing and earthworks, along both sides of the Blue Line, on occasion leading to violations of the Blue Line and several incidents of weapons pointing by the parties. On three occasions, UNIFIL liaised with the parties to de-escalate tensions, urging restraint. On 11 November, the Israel Defense Forces fired three smoke grenades, one of which landed across the Blue Line, east of Blida (Sector East) after two Lebanese Armed Forces intelligence staff approached the Blue Line. Two Lebanese Armed Forces soldiers, who were also present, were hospitalized briefly owing to smoke inhalation. On 29 November and 25 December, Lebanese Armed Forces and Israel Defense Forces personnel pointed weapons at each other west of Ayta al-Sha'b (Sector West). Following the latter incident, UNIFIL interposed itself between the sides and remained on the scene for 24 hours to ensure calm.

8. On 20 November, three men near Ayta al-Sha'b, one of whom briefly crossed the Blue Line, shouted towards Israel Defense Forces soldiers. On 26 November, while observers from Observer Group Lebanon were patrolling near Marun al-Ra's (Sector West), an Israel Defense Forces tank pointed its main armament towards the patrol. UNIFIL raised these incidents with both parties, including at the tripartite meeting on 7 December 2017. On 10 February, following military developments in the Syrian theatre involving the downing of an Israel Defense Forces aircraft, individuals in Kafr Kila, Udaysah (both Sector East) and Yaroun (Sector West) threw stones and flags across the Blue Line. The Lebanese Armed Forces intervened on each occasion, moving the crowd away from the Blue Line.

9. From 1 November to 19 February, UNIFIL recorded 204 ground violations of the Blue Line. Lebanese Armed Forces and Israel Defense Forces, including through the use of engineering equipment, were involved in 12 violations. A total of 113 (or 55 per cent) were committed either by shepherds with their flocks near the Shab'a Farms and Bastrah (Sector East) or farmers cultivating their fields around Rumaysh (Sector West). UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces regularly warned shepherds and farmers

not to cross the Blue Line. Most of the remaining violations involved farmers crossing to the Shu'ayb well, which straddles the Blue Line near Blida (Sector East).

10. Israel continued to violate Lebanese airspace almost daily, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and Lebanese sovereignty. From 1 November to 19 February, UNIFIL recorded 458 air violations of the Blue Line, totalling 1,684 overflight hours. Unmanned aerial vehicles accounted for 360 (79 per cent) of these violations; the remainder involved fighter or unidentified aircraft. UNIFIL protested all air violations to the Israel Defense Forces and urged their immediate cessation. The Government of Lebanon continued to protest the airspace violations, including in a letter addressed to the President of the Security Council and to me dated 8 February (A/72/742-S/2018/109). The Lebanese Armed Forces stated that such violations contribute to a sense of insecurity across Lebanon. Such violations of Lebanese sovereignty undermine the cessation of hostilities and efforts to reach a permanent ceasefire.

11. The Israeli occupation of northern Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line continued, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and Lebanese sovereignty. To date, Israel has not responded to the UNIFIL proposal submitted to both parties in 2011, aimed at facilitating the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from the occupied area. The Lebanese Armed Forces informed UNIFIL in July 2011 of the agreement of Lebanon to the proposal.

12. Lebanon also protested alleged violations of its sovereignty by Israeli vessels and ships operating near the Israeli line of buoys. The delineation of the maritime boundary between the two countries continues to be disputed. Lebanon considers that the line of buoys, installed unilaterally by Israel, runs through its territorial waters and does not recognize it. The United Nations does not recognize the line of buoys.

13. Lebanon alleged that Israel continues to violate its sovereignty by conducting electronic monitoring, espionage and surveillance through infrastructure deployed south of and along the Blue Line, surveillance devices placed on Lebanese territory and surveillance networks active in Lebanon, which the Government of Lebanon considers to be electronic warfare.

14. In accordance with resolution 1701 (2006), UNIFIL continued to assist the Lebanese Armed Forces in establishing an area between the Blue Line and the Litani River free of unauthorized armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL. The Force stands ready to act within the full scope of its mandate and capabilities should there be credible evidence or information supporting the presence of unauthorized weapons or the imminent threat of hostile activity emanating from the area of operations. The Lebanese Armed Forces regularly reiterated their strong commitment to act immediately upon receipt of evidence of unauthorized armed personnel or weapons in the area in contravention of resolution 1701 (2006).

15. In the course of its activities, UNIFIL observed 442 instances of individuals carrying unauthorized arms in the area of operations in violation of resolution 1701 (2006). Almost all of these instances (439) involved civilians carrying hunting weapons, mostly in the areas of Yaroun (Sector West), Bastrah, Blida, Mays al-Jabal and Sarda (all Sector East), in the vicinity of the Blue Line. The remaining incidents, not involving hunting weapons, are detailed in annex I. In each instance, UNIFIL alerted the Lebanese Armed Forces and requested that they take appropriate preventive measures. The Lebanese Armed Forces informed UNIFIL that they continue to follow up on these incidents to prevent their reoccurrence. UNIFIL takes seriously any allegation regarding the presence of unauthorized weapons in the area of operations, but has not been able within its capabilities to substantiate them independently.

16. UNIFIL coordinated with the Lebanese Armed Forces daily to conduct inspections at permanent, temporary and co-located checkpoints. Lebanese security forces screened and spot-checked vehicles at these locations. UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces operated a daily average of 19 temporary or permanent checkpoints. At the Litani Bridge (Sector West), UNIFIL maintains a 24-hour presence with the Lebanese Armed Forces.

17. UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces conducted on average nine counter-rocket launching operations daily, across the area of operations. These operations inspected strategic areas from which rockets could be launched. UNIFIL acts in support of the Lebanese Armed Forces in these inspections, and is prepared to take action independently if required and in accordance with its mandate.

18. Israel raised with UNIFIL the issue of individuals in civilian attire, whom it alleged were Hizbullah operatives conducting "reconnaissance" towards areas south of the Blue Line. UNIFIL observed and closely monitored activities, including photography by persons wearing civilian clothes in areas south of the Blue Line. In addition, UNIFIL visited almost daily areas where the non-governmental organization "Green Without Borders" operates. UNIFIL observed no violations or hostile activities in connection with activities or installations of this organization during the reporting period. UNIFIL continued to closely monitor three locations in which the Israel Defense Forces alleged the presence of Hizbullah weapons and infrastructure in the UNIFIL area of operations as reported in my previous report.

19. Pursuant to paragraph 15 of resolution 2373 (2017), UNIFIL continued to increase its visible presence and activities, with a focus on preserving the cessation of hostilities. In monitoring the cessation of hostilities, UNIFIL sustained its operational tempo as well as non-operational activities to mitigate risks in a timely manner, thereby preventing small incidents from escalating into larger-scale violence. UNIFIL also continued to operationalize resolution 2373 (2017), by enhancing the visibility of its operations through intensified patrols, including at night and by helicopter. UNIFIL conducted patrols in all municipalities and villages in the area of operations at least once weekly, with many covered more often, when tensions had been reported. Observer Group Lebanon and the UNIFIL Civil Affairs Section continued activities throughout the area of operations daily without incident. To safeguard the cessation of hostilities, UNIFIL continued to closely monitor the situation along the Blue Line from fixed positions combined with mobile vehicle and foot patrols. Enhancing its visible presence, particularly in sensitive areas, the Mission conducted over 25,000 patrols during the reporting period, with an increase along the Blue Line from 2,428 patrols in October to 2,562 in January.

20. The freedom of movement of UNIFIL was generally respected, except on 10 occasions, mainly owing to the inconvenience to local communities caused by heavy military vehicles on narrow roadways in civilian populated areas (see annex II). In each case, UNIFIL responded within its mandate, followed up with the Lebanese Armed Forces and local authorities and subsequently ensured its freedom of movement in the incident locations.

21. UNIFIL expanded its proportion of foot patrols, both along the Blue Line and across the area of operations, with 1,767 patrols (24 per cent of all patrol activities) in January, up from 1,085 in August (16 per cent of all patrol activities). In a number of villages, for instance, Ayta al-Sha'b, narrow roadways and community concerns necessitated that patrols be conducted on foot. The increase in foot patrols has enhanced UNIFIL situational awareness and monitoring. UNIFIL maintained close contact with community leaders in southern Lebanon and the Lebanese Armed Forces, to address any sensitivities without compromising mandated tasks.

22. The improved use of air assets contributed to a 26 per cent increase in operational flights, including day and night reconnaissance flights, from August to 19 February. UNIFIL conducted 171 hours of helicopter patrols (42.5 hours per month) from November to 19 February, concentrated over areas with limited access. Private property, rugged terrain or terrain contaminated by explosive remnants of war limit access by UNIFIL patrols. Where the conduct of patrols in heavy vehicles is not feasible, UNIFIL conducted vehicular patrols in surrounding areas that allowed for closer monitoring. In addition, officers from the UNIFIL Liaison Branch and unarmed military observers from Observer Group Lebanon of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, as well as UNIFIL personnel on light vehicle and foot patrols, are deployed to achieve unimpeded access throughout the area of operations. Such areas are also monitored by regular helicopter patrols. With the exception of northern Ghajar, UNIFIL covered all of its area of operations either on foot, by vehicle or by air at least weekly.

23. The Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL continued to regularly review their modus operandi to enhance their close coordination. UNIFIL conducted 17 per cent of its patrols with the Lebanese Armed Forces. The Lebanese Armed Forces expanded their presence along the Blue Line by participating with UNIFIL in more than 1,205 foot and vehicular patrols. UNIFIL conducted 60 daily activities in close coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces. The Fifth Intervention Regiment of the Lebanese Armed Forces, deployed on 22 September, is fully integrated into the joint planning and operations of UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces. Approximately 22 per cent of UNIFIL operational activities with the Lebanese Armed Forces involve the Regiment.

24. The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force carried out maritime interdiction operations on a 24-hour basis and capacity-building for the Lebanese Armed Forces-Navy. From 1 November to 19 February, the Maritime Task Force hailed 2,312 vessels, 494 of which were inspected and cleared by the Lebanese authorities. The Lebanese Navy maintains a current maritime picture of its waters through the coastal radar system. The Lebanese Armed Forces Navy has the capacity to deploy small units, with limited crew capabilities, able to operate in calm weather for up to 24 hours. The Lebanese Armed Forces Navy requires at least six vessels and trained crews able to stay a minimum of 72 hours per week at sea, to assume maritime interdiction duties from the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force. UNIFIL is supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces in requesting international donor support for the provision of one offshore patrol vessel to augment its existing capacity. UNIFIL conducted 107 training sessions, covering land and maritime operational issues, to improve common operational standards between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces.

25. Relations between UNIFIL and the local population remained largely positive; UNIFIL continued its outreach and engagement with local communities. The Mission continued to identify and implement quick-impact projects to address pressing needs of local communities, support the extension of State authority in the South and contribute to force acceptance in line with the priorities identified by the Lebanese Armed Forces during the strategic review of UNIFIL (see S/2017/202). UNIFIL continued to work closely with the Lebanese Armed Forces to establish a Lebanese Armed Forces civil-military cooperation centre in Marjayoun (Sector East).

B. Security and liaison arrangements

26. In mid-January, the Israel Defense Forces confirmed to UNIFIL their intent to initiate what they said were "defensive engineering works" in several areas along the Blue Line. UNIFIL stressed to the Israel Defense Forces that such activities — in particular, in the previously identified Lebanese "reservations" areas — could trigger

a strong reaction in Lebanon and proposed that both parties convene and discuss the matter through the UNIFIL-chaired tripartite mechanism. My Acting Special Coordinator reinforced these messages in her engagements with both parties. Following a tripartite meeting on 5 February, both sides agreed to continue their engagement with UNIFIL to discuss these contentious issues. The Israel Defense Forces commenced work south of the Blue Line, in non-reservation areas, on 7 February. UNIFIL continues, in coordination with my Acting Special Coordinator, to encourage all sides to use the existing liaison and coordination channels to maintain calm.

27. UNIFIL also chaired tripartite meetings on 8 November and 7 December. The Lebanese Armed Forces stressed, on each occasion, the detrimental effect of Israeli violations of resolution 1701 (2006) and Lebanese sovereignty and emphasized the importance of meaningful progress towards a permanent ceasefire. The Israel Defense Forces underlined their concerns about reconnaissance activities allegedly conducted by Hizbullah along the Blue Line. The Israel Defense Forces also raised recurring incidents of stone throwing and Blue Line violations by farmers and shepherds. During all three meetings, the parties renewed their commitment to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), including respect for the Blue Line and maintaining stability, and voiced their willingness to explore paths towards a permanent ceasefire.

28. In addition to the tripartite forum, UNIFIL and the parties made extensive use of other established liaison and coordination arrangements to exchange information and avoid the escalation of tensions between the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces. In early November, UNIFIL liaison mechanisms helped ensure that the seasonal olive harvest in Blida concluded without incident. Similarly, liaison and coordination efforts helped ensure that a demonstration at Marun al-Ra's, against the Balfour Declaration, on 2 and 3 November, took place without incident.

29. The establishment of a UNIFIL liaison office in Tel Aviv, Israel, was discussed with the Israeli authorities. Their agreement to the UNIFIL proposal remains pending since 2008.

30. Progress in the visible marking of the Blue Line remained limited. Most points agreed upon by the parties have been marked. To promote progress, UNIFIL, in close coordination with my Acting Special Coordinator, emphasized the strategic value of the marking for the parties, both in bilateral and tripartite discussions. The process remains an important confidence-building activity.

31. In line with the recommendations of the 2017 strategic review of UNIFIL and resolution 2373 (2017) and through the strategic dialogue, the Government of Lebanon, the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL, including through a joint expert-level working group, developed the concept of a model regiment. On 5 February, the Lebanese Armed Forces informed UNIFIL of the formal establishment of a model regiment within the South Litani Sector as of 1 February, to be deployed once the requisite personnel and equipment have been secured.

32. UNIFIL continued to implement the recommendations of the strategic review, pursuant to the strategic priorities identified (see annex III). A reconfigured UNIFIL Maritime Task Force, which, as at 1 January, consisted of six vessels, continues to assist the Government in securing Lebanese territorial waters. With the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, UNIFIL promoted an integrated and comprehensive approach to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), in particular in supporting the Government of Lebanon to increase its presence in southern Lebanon and the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces, notably in relation to prioritized land and maritime capabilities and deployment in southern Lebanon. The Missions also focused on a range of preventive actions necessary to maintain calm along the Blue Line and in the area of operations.

33. In line with its strategic priority to ensure that it is prepared to deliver on its mandate to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence, and following the strategic review, UNIFIL continued to train Mission personnel and in December conducted, with humanitarian partners, a multi-day exercise that tested protection of civilians procedures and protocols.

C. Disarming armed groups

34. No progress was achieved with respect to the disarmament of armed groups. The maintenance of arms outside the control of the State by Hizbullah and other groups continues to restrict the ability of the Government of Lebanon to exercise full sovereignty and authority over its territory. Hizbullah continued to acknowledge publicly that it maintains its military capacity. In an interview on 3 January 2018, Hizbullah Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah, underlined that the group was "working day and night ... to obtain all kinds of weapons that would enable it to achieve victory in the next war, if that war happens". The same day, a Hizbullah Member of Parliament Nawaf Moussawi reportedly warned that "the next war will not be geographically limited to the same confrontation areas of 2006 and that the resistance's ability to launch wide territorial operations is at an optimal level". On 29 January, a Hizbullah Member of Parliament Mohammad Raad was quoted by media as saying that "Hizbullah is stronger today and has capabilities that can destroy the Israeli Army."

35. The Government of Lebanon highlighted the importance of State sovereignty and national unity in the context of the Lebanese Armed Forces. In their forewords to the Lebanese Armed Forces capabilities development plan, presented on 12 February in Beirut, the Prime Minister of Lebanon underscored that the Lebanese Armed Forces are "the sole legitimate defender of the Lebanese State" and the need to "consolidate Lebanese State authority throughout all Lebanese territory and deny any presence to all non-state actors", while the President of Lebanon, Michel Aoun underlined that "Lebanon's internal stability is consolidated through ... the active role of the Lebanese Army, the Internal Security Forces, the General Security, the State Security and the Lebanese Customs."

36. As reported by the media, on 28 November, the Israel Defense Forces Spokesperson stated that "Hizbullah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah is an Israel Defense Forces target in the next war in Lebanon". On 28 January, the Israel Defense Forces Spokesperson alleged that "one in every three or four houses in southern Lebanon is a headquarters, a post, a weapons depot or a Hizbullah hideout", warning that "we know how to attack them accurately if required". On 31 January, the Minister of Defence of Israel, Avigdor Lieberman, warned that "the Lebanese Army and Lebanon are no different from Hizbullah," and would "all pay the full price", in the event of an attack on Israel.

37. The Lebanese Armed Forces and security forces continued counter-terrorism operations and arrests of individuals suspected of affiliation with or support for extremist groups. From 1 November to 28 February, 122 terrorism-related arrests were reported, including of suspected affiliates of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Nusrah Front, as well as suspects in the 2013 Abra clashes, the 2014 Haret Hrayk bombing and the 2015 Burj al-Barajinah terrorist attack. On 19 January, the Minister of Interior stated that security forces had thwarted an ISIL-linked terror plot targeting places of worship and government buildings over the holiday period. On 4 February, a suspected ISIL militant and a Lebanese Armed Forces soldier were killed, and six persons injured, in a raid in Tripoli, North Lebanon.

38. Armed clashes throughout Lebanon illustrated the continued presence of weapons outside of State control, posing a risk to stability. On 11 November, one Lebanese Armed Forces soldier was killed and four others wounded in raids against criminal gangs in Baalbek. On 10 December, a Lebanese Armed Forces soldier was injured by unidentified gunmen in Baalbek. On several occasions, personal disputes escalated into shooting, including in Baalbek, Dinniah and Tripoli.

39. The security situation in the Palestine refugee camps in Lebanon remained generally stable, except for clashes in the Ein el Helweh camp involving extremist groups and the joint Palestinian security forces, in addition to several personal disputes. A total of 4 people in the camp were killed and 11 injured. Several members of extremist groups left Ein el Helweh camp or surrendered to the Lebanese authorities. On 3 January, it was reported that Bilal Bader, the leader of an extremist group involved in numerous clashes, had fled to the Syrian Arab Republic. Intermittent violence also erupted in the Beddawi camp. A personal dispute led to two people being killed in the Rashidieh camp on 4 March.

40. On 14 January, a car bomb wounded a member of Hamas in Sidon. Following an investigation, the Lebanese Ministry of Interior announced on 26 January that a suspect had admitted to the attack. The suspect also claimed to have been assigned by Israeli intelligence agencies, a charge that Israel denied.

41. There was no progress in dismantling the military bases maintained by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada, which continue to compromise Lebanese sovereignty and impede the ability of the State to monitor and effectively control parts of the border.

D. Arms embargo and border control

42. In a letter addressed to the Security Council and myself on 28 November (S/2017/1000), the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations warned against "Iran's intentions and actions taken to continue arming Hezbollah" and subsequent military build-up by Hizbullah, including among civilians. The Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, in a letter to the Security Council and myself dated 5 December (S/2017/1019), accused Israel of "false and baseless accusations". On 2 December and 9 January, media reported Israeli strikes on targets in the Syrian Arab Republic, using Lebanese airspace. On 28 January, the Israel Defense Forces Spokesperson likened Lebanon to "one large missile factory," in the context of "Iran's ever-tightening control".

43. Allegations of arms transfers to Hizbullah continued on a regular basis and are of serious concern. While taking such allegations seriously, the United Nations is not in a position to substantiate them independently.

44. Reports of Hizbullah's engagement in the fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic continued. A number of Lebanese nationals also allegedly continued to fight with non-State armed groups in the Syrian Arab Republic.

45. Following operations in August-September 2017 to expel militants, the Lebanese Armed Forces consolidated their deployment along the border with the Syrian Arab Republic, including through land border regiments. A sharp decrease in the incidence of cross-border fire from the Syrian Arab Republic into Lebanon was observed. Cross-border incidents mostly involved smugglers. On 16 January, the Lebanese Armed Forces raided an informal settlement for Syrian refugees at Arsal and arrested over 20 Syrian nationals suspected of connections with terrorist groups and arms trafficking. On 30 January, the Lebanese Armed Forces arrested 23 Syrian nationals and seized weapons in another raid carried out in other informal settlements

at Arsal. Seven people were accused of connection with terrorist groups and arms smugglers. On 14 December, Lebanese and Syrian authorities reopened the Qa'-Jusiyah border crossing, bringing the total number of crossings open between the two countries to five.

46. A small number of localized initiatives to encourage Syrian refugees to return took place, including by the Reconciliation Committee established by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in Bayt Jinn, across the border from Shab'a, South Lebanon. Neither the Government of Lebanon nor the United Nations were involved in those initiatives. While attempting to enter Lebanese territory via a smuggling route on 19 January, 16 Syrians (13 females and 3 males), including 5 children, froze to death.

E. Landmines and cluster bombs

47. Six UNIFIL mine clearance teams cleared 1,587 m^2 of land and destroyed 384 anti-personnel mines in the UNIFIL area of operations. The Mine Action Service conducted 35 quality assurance visits, and provided three safety training and awareness briefings to 130 United Nations personnel. Seven mine risk education sessions and events were held in collaboration with the Lebanese Mine Action Centre and the UNIFIL Civil Affairs and Military components, benefiting over 690 children.

48. Three incidents, one of which killed a 13-year-old boy, involving landmines and unexploded ordnance, were recorded in the UNIFIL area of operations. On 9 January, the Government of Lebanon wrote to the Security Council to condemn the incidents. The Lebanese Armed Forces continued to remove mines and explosive devices left by militants in the eastern border area of Lebanon.

F. Delineation of borders

49. No progress was made towards the delineation or demarcation of the border between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. The Syrian Arab Republic and Israel have yet to respond to the provisional definition of the Shab'a Farms area proposed in my report of 30 October 2007 on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2007/641).

50. On 14 December, the Cabinet of Lebanon awarded licences for offshore oil and gas exploration to a consortium of three international oil companies. The maritime area concerned includes "block 9", located in waters disputed between Lebanon and Israel. In a note verbale to me, dated 21 December, the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations called for the Government of Lebanon to cease "any action that would violate Israel's sovereign rights". In a note verbale to me dated 26 January, the Permanent Representative of Lebanon conveyed her Government's message, that "Lebanon will not hesitate to avail itself of its inherent right to self-defence if an armed attack occurs against the economic activities ... in its maritime areas". On 29 January, the Minister of Energy and Water of Lebanon signed the contracts for exploration and production. Hostile rhetoric followed, with the Minister of Defence of Israel, on 31 January, describing the move as provocative and asserting the claim of Israel over block 9. On 31 January, the Prime Minister of Lebanon noted that the Government would follow up with the relevant international bodies to assert the right of Lebanon to exert its control over its maritime waters. On 1 February, the President of Lebanon cautioned against plotting against Lebanon, vowing to counter Israeli claims by diplomatic means while asserting the right of Lebanon to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity by all available means.

G. Political and institutional stability

51. On 21 November, the Prime Minister, Mr. Hariri, returned to Lebanon and withdrew his resignation the following day. On 29 November, the President confirmed that Mr. Hariri would resume his leadership of the Government. On 5 December, the Council of Ministers of Lebanon issued a statement confirming its commitment to its ministerial statement of 28 December 2016, noting that Lebanon must be kept out of regional conflicts and the internal affairs of Arab countries, and reiterating its commitment to resolution 1701 (2006), the Taif Accords, and the Charter of the League of Arab States. There has been regular Cabinet and parliamentary activity since.

52. On 8 December, the International Support Group for Lebanon convened a high-level meeting in Paris. In its joint statement, the Group expressed its satisfaction over the return to Beirut of the Prime Minister, noting that it would "pay close attention to the implementation of the Council [of Ministers'] decision [on disassociation from any regional conflicts, and wars and from internal affairs of Arab countries] by all Lebanese parties" and calling "upon all Lebanese parties to implement this tangible policy of disassociation from and non-interference in external conflicts, as an important priority, as spelled out in previous declarations, in particular the 2012 Baabda Declaration". The Group reiterated the need for full implementation of and full respect for all United Nations Security Council resolutions, including 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). These messages were reinforced by the Security Council in a press statement of 19 December on the situation in Lebanon (SC/13130).

53. In his statement in Paris, the Prime Minister of Lebanon noted that the policy of disassociation would allow Lebanon to maintain its national unity while respecting the Arab consensus. The Prime Minister also confirmed that his Government would pursue the preservation of the best relations with Arab countries and the international community with respect to Security Council resolutions, including resolution 1701 (2006). On 23 February, the President of Lebanon stressed that Lebanon abides by the policy of disassociation.

54. The International Support Group for Lebanon called upon all Lebanese parties to resume discussions towards a consensus on a national defence strategy, welcoming the statement of the President on 6 December, in which he underscored that the national defence strategy was an issue on which it was possible to reach common ground through dialogue.

55. In its joint statement of 8 December, the International Support Group for Lebanon also called upon the international community to continue to coordinate and step up its support for the Lebanese Armed Forces and all State security institutions, crucial to the country's sovereignty and unity. A ministerial meeting on support to the Lebanese security forces is scheduled for 15 March in Rome, under the auspices of the International Support Group. In preparation, the five-year strategic plans of the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces were endorsed by the Higher Defence Council of Lebanon on 19 January and presented to the international community in Beirut on 12 February.

56. Preparations for parliamentary elections continue. On 4 January, the Cabinet approved an amended electoral budget of $33 million. On 22 January, the President and the Prime Minister signed a decree calling for parliamentary elections on 6 May. Out-of-country voting is scheduled for 27 and 29 April. On 1 February, the Ministry of Interior published the initial voters list for review. On 5 February, candidate registration commenced. Preparations for international and local elections observation are under way. United Nations technical assistance with the electoral

process, in support of the Ministry of Interior, continues, as do efforts to promote women's participation in the parliamentary elections.

57. Political tensions between rival parties erupted into street violence from 29 January to 2 February. Calm returned following a united appeal by the political leadership.

58. On 20 December, the Prime Minister of Lebanon presented the country's national strategy for the prevention of violent extremism to government, diplomatic and United Nations representatives. The strategy, developed by all 29 ministries, awaits endorsement by the Council of Ministers of Lebanon.

59. The Government is finalizing its capital investment plan for presentation at an economic conference for development through reforms and with enterprises to be held in Paris on 6 April. The Government is seeking to finance the $16 billion plan, designed to stimulate growth, employment and infrastructure, through public-private partnerships, concessional loans and bilateral assistance. Donors and financial institutions have called for complementary sectoral and structural reforms, as well as fiscal measures.

60. As at 31 January, 995,512 Syrian refugees were registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a part of the impact of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. New registrations of Syrian refugees by UNHCR remain suspended by the Government since 2015. A decrease in the number of registered Syrian refugees was due mainly to deaths, onward movements, resettlement and a small number of spontaneous returns to the Syrian Arab Republic.

61. In response, the international community allocated $1.68 billion to Lebanon in 2017, with $1.37 billion disbursed or committed for that year, including $1.24 billion to United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations under the 2017 Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, representing 45 per cent of the total appeal.

62. The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan appeal for 2018 was jointly launched on 1 February by the Government and the United Nations, requesting $2.68 billion to support 2.8 million people with humanitarian assistance, as well as investment in the country's public infrastructure, services and local economy. At the launch, the Prime Minister reiterated that there would be no forced returns of Syrian refugees.

63. The final results of the vulnerability assessment of Syrian refugees, a socioeconomic survey conducted by UNHCR, the World Food Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund, confirmed that 76 per cent of households live below the poverty line (an increase from 71 per cent in 2016), with a total of 58 per cent of households living below the extreme poverty line (an increase from 53 per cent in 2016). Underscoring the increasing level of vulnerability, on 10 January, a Syrian refugee set himself on fire at a United Nations compound in North Lebanon.

64. Local authorities continue to report host community fatigue. Job competition was cited as a source of tension between host and refugee communities. In the last quarter of 2017, a growing number of municipalities threatened or implemented curfews and evictions against refugees, citing insufficient support for the municipalities or security or economic concerns. Evictions affected refugee households with respect to access to accommodation, basic services, children's education and livelihoods.

65. A number of demonstrations were held, including in reaction to the announcement by the United States on 6 December with regard to Jerusalem that also triggered widespread condemnation by Lebanese politicians. Following clashes between security forces and protesters in the vicinity of the United States Embassy in Beirut on 10 December, 43 persons were injured and 10 detained.

66. Tensions, especially among Palestine refugees, were precipitated by the announcement by the United States that it would withhold its contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). UNRWA has adopted additional emergency measures to preserve temporarily its health, education, social security and camp improvement services in Lebanon. However, additional financial support will be necessary for UNRWA to continue its operations in the near term.

III. Security and safety of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

67. UNIFIL continually reviewed its security plans and risk mitigation measures, taking into account security threat warnings and closely coordinated with the Lebanese authorities. In the Arqub area (Sector East), strict security measures, including the use of armed escorts, remained in place for movements by United Nations personnel. The alleged presence of extremist elements in Ein El Helweh camp for Palestine refugees, situated in Sidon along the main supply route connecting the UNIFIL area of operations with Beirut, continues to pose a security concern, potentially affecting UNIFIL movements through the city. Lebanese security institutions maintain a strong presence in surrounding areas.

68. On 29 December, UNIFIL discovered the theft of 2,240 rounds of small arms ammunition from an armoured personnel carrier stationed inside a United Nations position near Haris (Sector West). An immediate investigation led UNIFIL to recover 200 rounds of ammunition close to the facility. On 30 December, the General Directorate of State Security and the Lebanese Armed Forces seized the remaining ammunition, except for 26 rounds, from eight local individuals who had intended to sell it. Six of the eight suspects were released under judicial control, as minors; two adults remain in detention. Upon completion of the police investigation, the Military Prosecutor transferred the case to an investigating judge.

69. Following an internal investigation into the incident, the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander ordered an inspection of all UNIFIL units to ensure that all measures were in place for the safety of staff and premises, as well as for the secure storage of weapons and ammunitions, in line with United Nations standards, rules and regulations. UNIFIL remains in close contact with the Lebanese authorities as the investigation continues. In accordance with United Nations procedures, UNIFIL has convened a board of inquiry.

70. UNIFIL continued to monitor proceedings in Lebanese military courts against individuals suspected of planning or perpetrating serious attacks against UNIFIL. The Permanent Military Court held hearings on 16 January with regard to the attack against UNIFIL peacekeepers serving with the Spanish contingent in 2007 and in the case of terror intent opened in January 2014. The next hearings for both cases are scheduled for 10 April. In the case of an attempted serious attack against UNIFIL in 2008, in which one of the four sentenced perpetrators filed an appeal, the Military Court of Appeal held a hearing on 6 February; the next hearing is scheduled for 21 June. Three investigations launched into the serious attacks perpetrated against UNIFIL on 27 May, 26 July and 9 December 2011 are ongoing, pursuant to additional judicial instructions issued by the investigating judge. In the case of the homicide committed in 1980, when two UNIFIL peacekeepers from Ireland were shot dead and one injured, the Permanent Military Court held a final hearing on 9 January, but deferred to 27 March a decision to either render a sentence or re-open the case for further investigation.

IV. Deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

71. As at 22 February, UNIFIL comprised 10,506 military personnel, including 411 women, or 4 per cent of the Force, from 41 troop-contributing countries; 238 international staff, including 78 women; and 580 national civilian staff, including 150 women. The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force comprised five corvettes, one frigate, one helicopter and 752 of the Force's total military personnel, including 23 women. In addition, 56 military observers, including 6 women, from the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, serve with Observer Group Lebanon, under the operational control of UNIFIL.

V. Conduct and discipline

72. Neither UNIFIL nor the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon received allegations of sexual exploitation or abuse during the reporting period. Both entities continued to implement existing measures to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse. The United Nations continues to promote an environment in which staff feel able to report any case that might arise. In accordance with UNIFIL communications strategy, UNIFIL personnel and members of the local community were informed of the expected standards of conduct for United Nations personnel and how to report misconduct, in particular in relation to sexual exploitation and abuse. The United Nations country team prevention of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse network in Lebanon continued to develop information-sharing protocols and to share best practices.

VI. Observations

73. Crises in the region continue to pose a risk to the stability of Lebanon, the fragility of which was illustrated by the resignation, later rescinded, of the Prime Minister, Saad Hariri. The meeting of the International Support Group for Lebanon in Paris of 8 December was a welcome reiteration of the international community's support for Lebanon's stability, security and sovereignty. I echo the Group's call upon all Lebanese parties for tangible steps on the policy of disassociation, consistent with the Baabda declaration of 2012, and on all States and organizations to support the country's stability and security, with full respect for its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

74. As regional tensions persist, I note the Prime Minister's statement of 22 November that disassociation from external wars is critical to protect Lebanon. Unauthorized visits by foreign militia members to South Lebanon undermine the State authority and run contrary to the spirit of disassociation.

75. I reiterate my call upon all Lebanese parties and nationals to cease their involvement in the Syrian conflict. I note the significant reduction in shelling, shooting, incursions and attacks into Lebanese border areas from the Syrian Arab Republic. I continue, however, to condemn the movement of fighters and war materiel across the Lebanese-Syrian border in violation of resolution 1701 (2006). The lack of a delineated, demarcated Lebanese-Syrian border does not justify violations of Lebanese sovereignty by any party. I call upon all concerned to cease violations of the border and to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon.

76. The Lebanese Armed Forces continue to demonstrate their crucial role in the extension of State authority throughout the territory of Lebanon, defending the

country's sovereignty and territorial integrity and acting as the protector of the country's security. I encourage continued cooperation among the Lebanese security agencies, which has been key to recent security achievements, including in countering the threat of terrorism.

77. The presence of unauthorized weapons in the hands of Hizbullah remains of serious concern and warrants condemnation. The presence of those weapons, together with threatening rhetoric from both sides, heightens risks of miscalculation and escalation into conflict. I call upon the parties to exercise restraint at all times. Pursuant to resolution 1701 (2006), I call upon the Government of Lebanon to take all actions necessary to ensure the full implementation of the relevant provisions of the Taif Accords and of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), which require the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon so that, pursuant to the Lebanese Cabinet decision of 27 July 2006, there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than those of the Lebanese State.

78. I welcome the statement by the President of Lebanon, Michel Aoun, of 6 December recognizing the importance of a dialogue towards a national defence strategy to reinforce stability and strengthen unity in Lebanon. I reiterate my request to the Lebanese authorities for the resumption of the national dialogue, with the objective of formulating a national defence strategy that would address the presence of armed individuals and groups outside of State control. The Lebanese Armed Forces are the sole legitimate defender of the security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon. Earlier decisions of the national dialogue should be implemented, specifically those relating to the disarmament of non-Lebanese groups and the dismantling of the military bases of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada.

79. Continued adherence by all sides to resolution 1701 (2006) remains essential for the stability of Lebanon and the region. I am heartened by the Prime Minister's reiteration of his commitment in this regard. I remain concerned, however, about the lack of full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and the unfulfilled obligations of Lebanon and Israel. Non-compliance increases the risk of tensions and possibly escalation into hostilities. I call upon both parties to redouble efforts towards full adherence to resolution 1701 (2006) to bolster stability and prevent conflict. The continued commitment of Lebanon and Israel to resolution 1701 (2006) is of paramount importance.

80. UNIFIL continues to fulfil its mandate to assist the Lebanese authorities in establishing an area between the Litani River and the Blue Line free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and UNIFIL. The relative calm along the Blue Line, tested during the reporting period, should not be taken for granted. Recent discussions over construction work by Israel in areas of Lebanese reservation, illustrate the continued fragility of the situation. They speak to the need for progress towards a permanent ceasefire called for by resolution 1701 (2006), as a means of preventing conflict and moving from calm to durable stability and security for the communities living on either side of the Blue Line. In the meantime, it is essential that both parties refrain from unilateral actions that could increase mistrust and lead to miscalculations. I call upon both parties to avail of UNIFIL liaison and coordination arrangements. The open and constructive exchanges in the tripartite forum, including on long-standing violations of resolution 1701 (2006), are a testament to the commitment of the parties, as well as to their confidence in UNIFIL and the liaison and coordination arrangements. My Acting Special Coordinator for Lebanon will continue to deploy good offices and, together with the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander, will continue to explore opportunities for confidence-building measures.

81. I am concerned about the use of bellicose rhetoric, in particular in the context of the dispute between Lebanon and Israel over their exclusive economic zones. I urge both parties to refrain from unilateral actions that carry the risk of escalation and that could impact the stability of Lebanon and the region. My Acting Special Coordinator will continue to engage with the parties to seek ways to lower tensions and, if possible, explore ways to move forward on this issue. I encourage both parties to adopt an approach that minimizes security risks and takes advantage of the confidence-building potential of mutually beneficial exploitation of maritime oil and gas resources.

82. I remain concerned about the continuation of Israeli overflights of Lebanese territory. The Israel Defense Forces continue to occupy northern Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line. These are clear violations of resolution 1701 (2006). I reiterate my condemnation of all violations of Lebanese sovereignty and reiterate my call for Israel to cease its violations of Lebanese airspace and to withdraw its forces from northern Ghajar and the adjacent area north of the Blue Line.

83. Deepened cooperation between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces will be critical in furthering progress in the strategic dialogue and on steps towards implementation of resolutions 1701 (2006) and 2373 (2017). A model regiment in South Lebanon, together with the decision of the Government of Lebanon to reinforce deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces south of the Litani River, is testament to the Government's commitment to extend State authority.

84. I welcome the progress made by the Government of Lebanon in its preparations for a ministerial meeting in Rome, under the auspices of the International Support Group. The commitment of Lebanon to resolutions 1701 (2006) and 2373 (2017) and the continued accountability and independence of its security forces, remain key to reaffirming and bolstering international support to the State security institutions. I look forward to co-chairing with Italy, on 15 March in Rome, the meeting under the auspices of the International Support Group for Lebanon, to support the Lebanese Armed Forces and security institutions.

85. I welcome the proactive steps that UNIFIL has taken to implement resolution 2373 (2017) including by enhancing the tempo, visibility and effectiveness of its operations. This remains an ongoing process and further adjustments continue to be considered. The emphasis by UNIFIL on prevention continues to be vital in safeguarding the cessation of hostilities. The United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UNIFIL have also undertaken steps to ensure that the Security Council is provided with prompt, concrete and detailed reporting on violations of resolution 1701 (2006). The Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, visited UNIFIL and met with Lebanese and Israeli officials at the end of February, among other things to review the ongoing process of implementing the provisions of resolutions 1701 (2006) and 2373 (2017). The Secretariat will continue to maintain close contact with the parties, Council Members and troop-contributing-countries in the implementation of resolutions 1701 (2006) and 2373 (2017).

86. I am encouraged by the steady progress of UNIFIL in implementing the strategic review recommendations and look forward to continued progress in this regard, including on the identified priorities.

87. I am encouraged by signals of political will and determination to conduct the parliamentary elections on 6 May, the first since 2009. Renewing the mandate of the Parliament is a powerful step towards renewing the functioning of Lebanese institutions and ensuring accountability to the people of Lebanon, in line with the country's democratic tradition. It will be important to maintain confidence in the electoral process. I encourage the political parties to increase women's representation in Lebanese politics and include qualified women on their electoral lists. During the electoral period, I call upon all political leaders to maintain calm, exercise responsible

rhetoric, protect citizens' freedom of expression and ensure continued adherence to the Taif Accords and the Constitution of Lebanon. Peaceful, credible, transparent and inclusive elections will be important for the country's stability.

88. The most serious financial crisis in its 70-year history risks compromising the ability of UNRWA to provide critical services to the highly vulnerable Palestine refugee population in Lebanon, against the backdrop of overburdened Lebanese public services. UNRWA operations in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon are important for the promotion of stability and socioeconomic progress. I am grateful to those Member States which have advanced their annual commitments to enable UNRWA to continue operations in Lebanon in the near term, and look forward to significant additional financial support at the forthcoming ministerial conference to be held in Rome on 15 March.

89. The recent tragic deaths of refugees illustrate the desperation of those seeking safety and serve as a reminder that the situation inside Syria remains volatile. I commend the generosity and hospitality of the Lebanese people and authorities in hosting Syrian refugees and welcome recent statements by the Prime Minister that refugee returns will be in line with international norms and under United Nations auspices. Until conditions are met in Syria for a safe, dignified and voluntary return, in line with international standards, including the principle of non-refoulement, I reiterate the importance of the redoubling of their efforts by international partners and of creating a hospitable protection environment. A recent UNHCR survey shows that return home is the most sought-after solution by the refugees themselves. The protection and dignity of refugees in Lebanon must be ensured until they can find durable solutions outside of Lebanon.

90. Continued international assistance to refugees and host communities will be key in this regard. It is important to increase support to the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan and the predictability of its funding for 2018 and beyond. I wish to reiterate the importance of providing flexible and predictable multi-year support to Lebanon, as well as ensuring timely disbursement of funds, in accordance with the commitments made at the London Supporting Syria and the Region conference, held in February 2016, and the Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, held in April 2017. I look forward to strong multi-year engagements by donors, with a heightened focus on development funding.

91. I look forward to the implementation of structural and sectoral reforms, critical to the promotion of economic growth and job creation. In this regard, I welcome ongoing preparations ahead of the economic conference for development through reforms and with enterprises, including the finalization of the capital investment plan, to be held in Paris on 6 April.

92. I urge all Lebanese stakeholders to maintain the positive spirit of unity and national interest that marked the period following the Prime Minister's return. Consolidating calm along the Blue Line remains vital to prevent the risk of any incident sparking renewed conflict and derailing progress towards stability and prosperity. I encourage all stakeholders in Lebanon, Israel and the region to facilitate a conducive environment in this regard. The United Nations will maintain its unflinching engagement in support of Lebanon, and I am grateful for the international community's continued consensual backing of this agenda.

93. I extend my appreciation to all countries contributing military personnel and equipment to UNIFIL and Observer Group Lebanon. I commend Acting Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Pernille Kardel, and the Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNIFIL, Major General Michael Beary, for their leadership, and the civilian and military personnel of UNIFIL, as well as the staff of the Office of the Special Coordinator, for their continued efforts.

Annex I

Unauthorized weapons observed by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon from 7 November to 19 February

UNIFIL observed 442 instances of individuals carrying unauthorized arms in the area of operations in violation of resolution 1701 (2006). The overwhelming majority of these instances (439) involved civilians carrying hunting weapons, mostly in the areas of Yaroun (Sector West), Bastrah, Blida, Mays al-Jabal and Sarda (all Sector East), in the vicinity of the Blue Line. The remaining incidents, not involving hunting weapons, are listed below:

1. On 12 November, an individual fired a pistol in the air multiple times near Bayt Lif (Sector West).

2. On 23 November, two men with automatic rifles were observed outside a funeral ceremony near Bint Jubayl (Sector West).

3. On 8 December, two individuals fired ten shots in the air from a civilian vehicle near Markaba (Sector East).

Annex II

Restrictions on the freedom of movement of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon from 7 November to 19 February

1. On 17 November, following negotiations, a UNIFIL patrol in the vicinity of Marjayoun (Sector East) returned to base after a Lebanese Armed Forces soldier claimed that the planned route would continue outside the UNIFIL area of operations, which would require prior authorization. The Lebanese Armed Forces later clarified that the issue stemmed from a misunderstanding, and the patrols continued along the route the following day.

2. On 21 November, two men in a vehicle stopped a UNIFIL patrol in the vicinity of Tiri (Sector West), advising the patrol that it would block a narrow village street and requesting it to utilize an alternate road and then continue on its planned route. After engaging with the individuals, UNIFIL used an alternate road briefly before returning to their planned route. UNIFIL informed the Lebanese Armed Forces.

3. On 12 December, two men stopped a vehicle in a UNIFIL patrol near Bayt Lif (Sector West). The patrol left the area and returned shortly afterwards with a Lebanese Armed Forces escort to continue along the planned route. In a meeting the next day with the Mayor of Bayt Lif, he explained that the individuals were concerned about the patrol obstructing traffic in the village.

4. On 15 December, a man stopped a UNIFIL patrol in Bafiliyah (Sector West) and requested it to turn around. UNIFIL left the area and returned with a Lebanese Armed Forces escort to resume the patrol. The Mayor of Bafiliyah subsequently told the Civil Affairs Section that the community preferred that UNIFIL be accompanied by the Lebanese Armed Forces.

5. On 18 December, two individuals with a vehicle stopped a UNIFIL patrol near Siddiqin (Sector West). Despite negotiations with accompanying Lebanese Armed Forces personnel, the patrol was unable to proceed further. The joint patrol used an alternate route to complete the operational activity. After subsequent discussions between the UNIFIL Civil Affairs Section with the Mayor and community of Siddiqin, UNIFIL patrols have proceeded since on the route without incident.

6. On 18 January, a UNIFIL patrol encountered a locked gate along the planned route near Arab al-Wazzani (Sector East). The patrolled bypassed the gate and completed its scheduled assignments.

7. On 9 February, a UNIFIL vehicle patrol passed a roadblock south of Rashaf (Sector West). An individual in civilian clothes in a vehicle followed the patrol into Rashaf and gestured the patrol to leave the area. On its way back, after completing its scheduled assignment, the patrol discovered a second roadblock located about 600 metres away from where it had encountered the first roadblock.

8. On 12 February, municipality police officers stopped a UNIFIL patrol from passing through Ayta al-Sha'b (Sector West). Following an intervention by the Lebanese Armed Forces personnel patrolling with UNIFIL, the patrol continued on its planned route.

9. On 14 February, six individuals stopped a UNIFIL patrol in Tiri (Sector West) and gestured to the patrol to leave the area by hitting the vehicle bonnet. The patrol continued its activity by using an alternate route.

10. On 18 February, an Observer Group Lebanon vehicle with two observers was stopped north of Ramiyah (Sector West) by three unidentified individuals who politely but repeatedly asked the patrol to leave the area. The patrol turned round without completing its mission. Observer Group Lebanon, together with UNIFIL, is following up with the Lebanese Armed Forces on the incident.

Annex III

Update on the implementation of the recommendations of the 2017 strategic review of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

1. Further to the letter dated 8 March 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/202) communicating the strategic priorities and key recommendations of the strategic review of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the present overview provides an update on progress in the implementation of those recommendations.

Protection of civilians

2. UNIFIL continued its liaison with interlocutors from the Government of Lebanon on the protection of civilians and continued its close coordination with the Office of the Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Lebanon.

3. As part of ensuring mission-wide preparedness, UNIFIL continued to roll out one-day training modules on the implementation of its protection of civilians mandate. Building on the contingency plan and the logistics plan for the protection of civilians, developed in 2017, UNIFIL plans to undertake its first protection of civilians exercise in close coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces in March 2018.

Strategic dialogue mechanism

4. UNIFIL continued its support to the Lebanese Armed Forces, with the Deputy Force Commander and the Deputy Head of Mission engaging on a range of coordination and capacity-building issues.

5. With the assistance of UNIFIL, the Lebanese Armed Forces finalized a concept of operations for the model regiment, which included a proposed mission strategy, organizational structure, materiel requirements and deployment schedule. In coordination with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, UNIFIL continued to assist the Lebanese Armed Forces in engaging international donors prior to the ministerial meeting in Rome, scheduled for 15 March. In addition to the model regiment, there is a particular focus on the provision of an offshore patrol vessel for the Lebanese Navy and the establishment of a Lebanese Armed Forces civil military cooperation centre.

6. With the financial support from UNIFIL and the Government of the Kingdom of Spain, initial construction works for the Lebanese Armed Forces civil military cooperation centre began in Marjayoun (Sector East); the centre is expected to be completed in mid-2018.

7. The Maritime Task Force continues to provide onshore and offshore training to the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy. UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces Naval School have developed a training concept for 16 courses that will be conducted by November 2018. Meanwhile, the Lebanese Armed Forces has developed its own plan for non-cooperative boarding training.

Liaison and coordination with the parties

8. In January 2018, UNIFIL adopted new guidance and standard operating procedures on coordination to ensure optimal synchronization of action by Mission assets in crises or in case of an incident in the area of operations.

9. In addition, as part of the deployment of a second permanent Liaison Team south of the Blue Line, five staff officers were reassigned to the UNIFIL Liaison Branch. UNIFIL also continued advocating with Israeli authorities for the establishment of a liaison office in Tel Aviv.

Structure of the uniformed and civilian components of the Force

Land forces

10. In January 2018, UNIFIL issued an order aimed at increasing the frequency, depth and effectiveness of coordination between the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL.

Maritime Task Force

11. The Maritime Task Force currently comprises six vessels: five corvettes and one frigate (in lieu of a corvette). The authorized maximum number of Maritime Task Force personnel has been reduced to 780. UNIFIL continued to support the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy in engaging donors about the requested provision of the above-mentioned offshore patrol vessels.

Community outreach activities

12. UNIFIL continued to make progress on the recommendations pertaining to community outreach activities. The community outreach board, formed in mid-2017, continued to convene on a quarterly basis, while the subcommittees on strategic communication and programme/project activities meet on a weekly basis to coordinate quick-impact projects and other outreach activities.

13. The Mission has finalized its list of quick-impact projects for 2018–2019, giving priority to sensitive villages along the Blue Line and areas where the battalions with limited or no national project funds are deployed. In addition, UNIFIL is increasingly involving the Lebanese Armed Forces in no-cost community and programmatic activities, such as market patrols.

14. UNIFIL completed the analysis of the public perceptions survey, which was presented in September, and provided its recommendations on strategic communication and public information to the Mission leadership. The Mission is examining options, within existing resources, to employ a second public opinion polling in the coming months.

Liaison in Beirut

15. Throughout the reporting period, UNIFIL and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon met regularly with representatives of the Lebanese Government, the Security Council and troop-contributing countries on a range of issues, including the model regiment initiative. In December 2017, UNIFIL deployed a senior representative in Beirut to continue engagement with relevant counterparts. In addition, UNIFIL continued to liaise with relevant United Nations agencies, through regular country team coordination meetings, and contributed to the countrywide integrated strategic framework for 2018.